

The
PRACTICAL SAYINGS
of
CATHERINE McAULEY

A Reprint
of
MARY CLARE MOORE, A LITTLE BOOK
OF PRACTICAL SAYINGS, ADVICES
AND PRAYERS OF ... MARY CATHARINE McAULEY
London: Burns, Oates & Co., 1868

With a
New Preface, Introduction, and Appendix
by
Mary C. Sullivan

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This book is primarily a reprint of a book long out of
print:

[Mary Clare Moore], comp.

*A Little Book of Practical Sayings, Advices and
Prayers of Our Revered Foundress, Mother Mary
Catharine [sic] McAuley*

London: Burns, Oates & Co., 1868

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Mary C. Sullivan, editor.

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Editor's Preface

This small booklet is primarily a new printing of a book compiled and published by Mary Clare Moore in 1868 and long out of print. This reprinting of *A Little Book of the Practical Sayings, Advices and Prayers of Our Revered Foundress, Mother Mary Catharine* [sic] *McAuley* (London: Burns, Oates & Co., 1868) reproduces exactly, but in new typing, the wording and pagination of the original book so that the page references to it cited in other publications may remain accurate and useful.

Reprinting this book has been occasioned by requests for copies of it that have arisen among those who have come to see the unique value of this compilation, as this is explained in the editor's introduction which follows. Original copies of the book are held in the Archives of the Institute of Our Lady of Mercy, Bermondsey, London, and in the Mercy Congregational Archives, Dublin, and presumably elsewhere, that is, in places not generally accessible to all interested readers and researchers. This printing is, therefore, offered for their convenience, in as close to "facsimile" form as is possible. However, it is not, strictly speaking, a photographic facsimile of the original, but rather a retyping and printing of its exact wording and pagination. The only elements that are not reprinted here are two long quotations in the front matter. One is a passage on preserving the spirit of a foundress taken from a work titled *Practical Meditations* by an unnamed priest of the Society of Jesus; and the other, a long extract from "The First Sister of Mercy" by H. J. Coleridge, SJ, published in *The Month* 4 (February

1866): 111-127. Coleridge (1822-1893) was a distinguished Anglican and a colleague of John Henry Newman. In 1857 he was ordained a Catholic priest. He joined the Jesuits in the same year, and became the first Jesuit editor of *The Month* in 1865. A much published biblical scholar, he was evidently impressed by the “character” of Catherine McAuley as he felt he saw this in the Sisters of Mercy he knew: “gentle, patient, hardworking, humble, obedient, charitable, and, above all, simple and joyous”—the quotation with which the extract concludes.

The new appendix to this reprinting contains further authentic sayings of Catherine McAuley that may supplement those in the *Practical Sayings*. These are selected from sources that were, in some cases, not available to Mary Clare Moore, the compiler of the *Practical Sayings*, who apparently compiled the sayings she presented largely from memory, though she may have consulted some written sources. Any authentic selection, Clare’s or that in the appendix, can be only that, a selection culled from available, authentic possibilities.

Mary C. Sullivan

Editor's Introduction

In the Annals for the year 1868 of the Sisters of Mercy in Bermondsey, London, Mary Clare Moore, the superior, described, in her own hand, her compilation of the *Practical Sayings*:

One of the resolutions of good which followed the August Retreat this year was a determination to collect even a few of the maxims and practical sayings of our revered Foundress. The design was submitted to the Bishop [Thomas Grant, of Southwark] . . . and when he saw the manuscript he advised to communicate the project to the Community at Baggot Street, Dublin, the Parent House of our Institute, as suggestions or additions might be made which would prove useful. The little collection was sent, and returned with expressions of satisfaction, nothing was remembered additional, except the wish which our revered Foundress had expressed, that those who came on business, or even visitors to the Convent and the poor should not be kept waiting either at the door or in the Convent longer than necessary.

In a footnote to these Annals, Clare recalled that on one occasion in 1838 Catherine McAuley nearly got herself in trouble by hastening to the door:

She always went quickly herself if the bell at the entrance door . . . was not answered

immediately, which once nearly led to her being arrested for the debt incurred in building the schools at Kingstown convent [Dún Laoghaire]... The Bailiff handed her the Warrant as she opened the door—with great presence of mind she gave it back saying she would mention it, and as the man did not know her and probably was unwilling to arrest a Nun, the door was shut against him and the Sisters took care not to allow our dear Foundress to open it while this unpleasant lawsuit was pending.

Aside from this additional maxim and the revealing gloss on it (some “sayings” had their common-sense exceptions!), the reaction at Baggot Street to Clare’s compilation was uniformly positive. In the community at the time were Mary de Pazzi Delany, Clare Augustine Moore, and Mary Aloysius Cowley, all of whom had lived with Catherine McAuley at Baggot Street and been repeatedly instructed by her as they began religious life as Sisters of Mercy.

Initially Clare’s plan had been to have each sister “write a copy for her own use, but on consideration this plan seemed troublesome and the cost of manuscript books almost as expensive as printing.” So Bishop Grant was again consulted as to “whether it would be allowable to print the ‘Sayings & Maxims.’” He agreed, and by December 12, 1868, five hundred copies of the booklet were printed, and sent to communities the Bermondsey community had founded and to Mercy communities around the world with whom they corresponded. Each copy was sent with a facsimile of Catherine McAuley’s handwriting: “May God bless you, my dearest Sister, and preserve

you in grace & health. Your ever affectionate, Mary C. McAuley.” This hand-written prayer had been cut from one of Catherine’s letters, photographed, and then posted with the booklet.

The response from even far-flung Mercy communities was universal gratitude and affirmation. Many of the superiors of these communities had known Catherine McAuley personally and felt they could hear her voice in what was sent them. “Some of the Rev. Mothers, who had had the happiness of hearing the instructions of our revered Foundress, bore testimony to the fidelity with which her words had been recorded.” In Melbourne, Australia, Ursula Frayne was “truly delighted”: “How exactly dear Reverend Mother’s words are noted down, I could almost fancy myself listening to her once more.” From Cork, Mary Josephine Warde wrote: “I remember almost all the dear little ‘sayings’ of our ever loved, blessed Foundress.” Mary Aloysius O’Connell, the first novice received by Catherine McAuley in Cork and now the superior in Sunderland, England, said the little book “brought many a good instruction back to my mind.”

The superior in Belfast, Mary Juliana Delany—Mary de Pazzi Delany’s sister, who had entered the Baggot Street community on August 15, 1841 and who now wore Catherine McAuley’s silver ring of profession—was also grateful: “the dear little books will, with the blessing of God, be the means of preserving her holy spirit . . . and animate us to imitate the example of virtue given by her.” Letters of thanks also came from Birmingham and Derry. Even Mary Bridget (Anna) Carroll, one of the first novices received by Catherine McAuley at Baggot Street in

January 1832 and now the superior of the Presentation Sisters, George's Hill, Dublin, wrote:

Reading over the dear Foundress's sayings set me thinking of 1831, and brought her with her penetrating eye so vividly before me that I almost fancied I was by her side and she reading the Lecture at nine in the morning.

Thus the response to the first publication of the *Practical Sayings* in 1868 was overwhelmingly positive, especially on the part of women who had known Catherine McAuley directly and listened to her instructions.

The *Practical Sayings*, therefore, bears a special authenticity that cannot be accorded to any other publications of Catherine McAuley's sayings and maxims that do not incorporate its exact wording. It was the earliest such compilation, its contents affirmed by actual witnesses to Catherine McAuley's teachings. While this booklet does not include *all* of Catherine's authentic sayings—there are others in her letters, in her other writings, and in the biographical manuscripts written about her by her contemporaries—what are here bear the firsthand testimony of women who actually and often heard her speak.

Clare Moore herself joined the Baggot Street "ladies" on October 13, 1828, subsequently left temporarily because of poor health, and then returned permanently on June 10, 1830. She was one of the first novices Catherine McAuley received as a Sister of Mercy on January 23, 1832, and one of the first to profess her vows at Baggot Street on January 24, 1833. She nursed with Catherine in the 1832 cholera epidemic, helped her to prepare the Rule and

Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy, journeyed with her to two of the earliest foundations (Tullamore and Charleville), and remained at Baggot Street until July 1837 when she went, with Catherine, to become the superior of the new foundation in Cork. Two years later she traveled with Catherine from Cork to Dublin, lived there for two months, and then went with her to found the new community in Bermondsey, London where they lived together for two more months. Clare was temporary superior in Bermondsey from November 1839 until June 1841. She returned to Baggot Street briefly, and then to Cork, until she was recalled to Bermondsey, as the appointed superior, in December 1841. She remained superior there, except for fifteen months in 1851-1852, until her death on December 14, 1874.

Thus Clare Moore *knew* Catherine McAuley and her thinking as intimately as any of the earliest sisters can be said to have known her. Catherine confided in her, sought her counsel, and called her “our old beloved companion” and “our beloved old companion.” To her sister Clare Augustine, Clare herself wrote of Catherine in 1844: “Tho’ you know much about her, you did not know her as I knew her.”

Three exact reprintings of Clare Moore’s 1868 compilation of the *Practical Sayings* occurred, two in Ireland and one in the United States. In Dublin, under the identical, full title of the 1868 edition, reprints were published by M. H. Gill & Son in 1886, and by Browne & Nolan, Ltd. in 1925. In Burlingame, California, under the title *Counsels of Our Beloved Foundress*, an exact reprinting of the *Practical Sayings* was published by the Convent of Our Lady of Mercy in 1940.

Moreover, in the United States, Mary Austin Carroll published two nearly exact reprintings of Clare Moore's compilation, in 1877 and 1878, both under the title, *A Few of the Sayings, Instructions, and Prayers of the Foundress of the Sisters of Mercy* (New York: Catholic Publication Society Co., 1877 and 1878). In each of these volumes, Carroll, then in New Orleans, wrote:

This little book is scarcely more than a reprint of the London Edition published by Mother Clare Moore of Bermondsey. We have made but few additions to the collection which that eminent Religious caused to be printed . . . but which has long since been out of print.

Later in 1878 and again in 1879, Carroll began to compile her own editions of the *Sayings and Instructions* of Catherine McAuley. These repeated some of the wording in Clare Moore's compilation, but Carroll's additions also included some "sayings" taken from faulty transcriptions of Catherine's letters that had been mailed to her, and from faulty transcripts of other sources whose original manuscripts were unavailable to her or whose historical origins were not then known.

Thus began the long history, by Carroll and other editors, of gradually more or less unreliable, and usually undocumented, versions of what purported to be Catherine McAuley's own sayings. These editions were often called her *Maxims and Counsels* (1900), or her *Thoughts from the Spiritual Conferences* (1946), or simply *Catherine's Words* (1988). Sometimes they were linked to each day of the calendar year. Many Mercy archives, book shops, individual sisters and

others throughout the world have copies of these works, and many of the supposed “sayings” in them appear on Mercy notepaper, posters, calendars, and electronic messages.

Because the contents of these and of other works under other titles were often derived from one another, or re-worded what they presented, they shared the same problems, and gradually became more and more remote from the wording in authentic original sources. Hence, the need to reprint and examine again the 1868 compilation of Mary Clare Moore, *A Little Book of Practical Sayings, Advices and Prayers of Our Revered Foundress, Mother Mary Catharine [sic] McAuley*. This little book is at least one authentic source compiled by a firsthand witness, though one is mindful that Catherine’s letters, her own writings, and the firsthand reports of her “sayings” in the biographical manuscripts written about her by her contemporaries are also authentic sources.

Why was there, and is there still, a desire to know and remember what Catherine McAuley said? To know what she used to say often and what she used to counsel and instruct? It would take a long essay to respond in an adequate way to this significant question. Perhaps each reader can try to write that “essay” in her own thoughts and meditations. But let us try to do so here, in a preliminary way, within the brief space of this introduction.

Over the years, the short teachings of many of the saints have been published. For example, we have the “Maxims” of St. Teresa of Avila, St. John of the Cross, and St. Francis de Sales, and various versions of those of St. Francis of Assisi. Either these saints

saw a value in preparing some brief statements of their spiritual insights and values, or, more frequently, their colleagues and disciples wished to preserve, in brief form, some of their counsels and teachings. They evidently saw a spiritual benefit in doing so.

The history of this literary form goes back at least to the Book of Proverbs in the Hebrew scriptures, and the form was common in the writings of other peoples contemporary with the Israelites. Whether the sentences or brief paragraphs are called maxims, proverbs, aphorisms, counsels, axioms, or simply “sayings” they share some of the same characteristics. They briefly address important topics; they reflect, in some way, the characteristic thinking and values of their originator; and they are usually, though not always, worded in a memorable way. For example, they may use metaphor, parallelism, alliteration, repetition, or striking antithesis in a way that clings to one’s memory.

But what is the value of preserved sayings, in and of themselves? The answer to this question might well be simply this. The sayings are usually distillations of major concerns of their author. While no one saying captures all of her or his major concerns, each one highlights some significant aspect of the person’s belief and motivation. These sayings are remembered and recorded not because they were spoken *once* but because they were evidently *repeatedly* spoken and seem to express a recurring theme in the person’s views on an important matter. Taken together, a collection of such sayings is a kind of summary, albeit abbreviated, of some of the central convictions and advice of the person in question.

But there are cautions to be heeded in

reading the authentic sayings of another person. Any collection of sayings will be necessarily incomplete and thus possibly give a one-sided or lop-sided impression on reading it. The sayings may have been selected by a compiler or editor with a particular goal, theme, or preference in mind and thus tell only part of the story. The words used may be archaic, and thus the real meaning of a saying may be misunderstood. Finally, the audience of the original saying may be unknown: to whom were the words addressed? Audience has a great deal to do with meaning and its scope. Or the timing of the saying may be unknown: when did the person say this? Under what circumstances? In her mature life? At the beginning or in the midst of a discernment, or after long experience? Did she say it in a certain period of her life, or on her deathbed? Insofar as these critical historical questions are taken into account, usually by documentation of each source, there can be real benefit in pondering the authentic sayings of a respected person, because of what they recall to mind.

For Catherine McAuley, prayer itself *is* remembering, recollecting, recalling: for instance, the example and teachings of Jesus, the promises of God in Jesus' death and resurrection, and past experiences of God's merciful assistance. Remembering these crucial realities as we go about our daily works of mercy was, for her, what being "centered in God" is all about. She "loved to dwell on the words" of Jesus: "If his blessed words ought to be revered by all, with what loving devotion ought the religious impress them on her memory." For her, these God-given memories underlie and animate our "ordinary duties" and cleanse our intentions.

As she says in the *Practical Sayings*, such remembering will shape one's very life, and even quicken the memory of those she serves. For example, she will serve others "ever mindful" of the service of Jesus, "so that any person who sees [her] or speaks with [her] may be reminded of his sacred life on earth."

Many of Catherine McAuley's sayings and repeated counsels would seem to have universal application and usefulness, and reflection on them can be helpful to anyone sincerely interested in the way she lived and in what she often said. However, one also has to acknowledge that most of Catherine's instructions were advice addressed specifically to Sisters of Mercy as vowed women religious, and as such they are particularly relevant to them. She was not speaking directly to her lay associates, her family members, or diocesan clergy when she spoke of the vow of poverty or of fidelity to the purposes of the religious congregation of the Sisters of Mercy. So long as this limitation is kept in mind, Catherine McAuley's sayings are well worth everyone's serious study and reflection, for at least three salient reasons.

First, the Second Vatican Council and many church documents have strongly urged women religious to "return to the original inspiration behind a given community," to "the spirit" of the founder. We cannot do this unless we know what the founder did and said. This heritage includes "the intentions" of the founder. The language of Catherine McAuley's "inspiration," as she perceived and framed it, and of her "intentions" as she expressed them is a pivotal articulation of this heritage, though she herself did not ever say or claim this. Rather, she saw the Sisters of

Mercy as the fruit, not of her words or work, but of God's "providential guidance," God's "design." For her the true "founder" was God, and "God will finish in us the work He has begun." This is an essential conviction of hers to keep in mind as one reads her sayings.

A more universal reason for taking the sayings of Catherine McAuley to heart arises from the reality of the communion of saints, that community of God's people, both living and now living anew, who inspire, encourage, challenge, and support us in our common journey Godwards, the journey beckoned and enabled by the God present and active in the heart of this communion and movement. What holy people in the past came to believe and say has a vital relevance in our present efforts to surrender to the Spirit of God, the central "speaker" and "worker" always compassionately "helping" and "sighing" and "groaning" within us (Romans 8.22, 26). Theologians speak of holy women and men like Catherine McAuley as "creative models," as "paradigmatic figures" and "friends of God and prophets" whose creativity is a "free gift and challenge to the church" (Elizabeth Johnson). * As such, what they had to say deserves a hearing and an open questioning as to the possibility of its applicability, here and now, in our own historical moment and place.

Most of all, in the case of Catherine McAuley, we have to acknowledge a present phenomenon that is not of our own doing and would seem to be the gracious activity of God for some mysterious purpose. Much to her own surprise and humble confusion, throughout the world today, wherever Sisters of Mercy have been or are, Catherine McAuley is loved—for reasons

we cannot exhaustively explain. Christians (and perhaps others), in all walks of life, women and men, somehow find her attractive, and tell us they turn to her for help and encouragement. It is as if God in her is still founding or renewing or designing something precious in God's eyes. We Sisters of Mercy can only bow before this apparent act of God. We are not surprised that Catherine is loved and found helpful. We too treasure her companionship. But we are awed by what God seems to be continuing to do through her, in the minds and hearts of those who know her, and we are grateful for that gift in which we share.

A few of the sayings in the *Practical Sayings* may at first strike readers as "hard." These are ones that will require continued pondering, to see in what sense they may remain helpful insights into life in the Spirit. Some may need to be interpreted in a wider context or understood in relation to a wider principle. Neither Catherine McAuley, nor Clare Moore, nor any of the earliest Sisters of Mercy who affirmed them as Catherine's authentic sayings was inhumane or unappreciative of the fact that we are historical human beings not angels. But neither were they unaware of the demands of the Gospel. Jesus himself knew that often "the road is hard that leads to life" (Matt 7.29) and that "it will be hard for a rich person" (Matt 19.23). On occasion his disciples also said: "This teaching is hard; who can accept it?" (John 6.60). There is always the possibility, at least as the author of the Letter to the Hebrews feared, that "there is much to say that is hard to explain, since [we] have become dull in understanding" (5.11). Some of Catherine's sayings may speak to an earlier or a later moment or phase of one's life, or may need the companionship

of another of her sayings. Probably none should be immediately dismissed as obsolete.

Sayings are, by definition, individual sentences or short paragraphs, placed side by side, in a “row” as it were, as if these separate utterances were all on an equal plane, and each could be fully understood without reference to the others. As there is in Christian faith a hierarchy of truths, so in the realm of the spirit there are relationships within which some concerns are subordinate to others, while some are central or paramount. Thomas Merton speaks of this “hierarchy of value for the Christian” in discussing the sayings of St. John of the Cross.** In any collection of sayings (which is always a *selection*) some of this context, this framework of belief and motivation, is inevitably missing, and yet is needed in order to understand the place and meaning of a particular saying in the larger scheme of the person’s faith, hope, and love. All that a person ever said or did or wrote (if such could ever be assembled) would not be enough to encompass the fullness of God’s action in her life or the fullness of her efforts to trust, hope, and love. So in meditating on Catherine McAuley’s sayings, we have only pieces, as it were, of her insight into that action and effort, guided by whatever else we have grasped of God’s ways and hers. For example, we know that for Catherine McAuley “Union and Charity” were paramount, as we see in the Rule and Constitutions she wrote. Thus many individual sayings are subordinate to this overriding aspiration. And for her, the example of Jesus of Nazareth and some effort to resemble him “in some one thing at least” was a constant call, situating all other efforts and inspirations around this following of Jesus Christ.

It may help our reading of her sayings to keep these central concerns in mind. The *Practical Sayings* are surrounded by a host of other, but related, sayings and instructions found elsewhere in Catherine's words.

One of the great benefits of Catherine McAuley's or any thoughtful, good person's sayings is that they are reminders, they raise up in our memory what is important, even crucial. When we quietly ponder their meaning, they may "clear the deck," as it were, of what is distracting or secondary or even irrelevant to a thoughtful, graced life.

Perhaps this may be one of the experiences of those who read this little book.

*Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Friends of God and Prophets* (New York: Continuum, 1998), 237.

**Thomas Merton, "Introduction," *Counsels of Light and Love of St. John of the Cross* (Wheeling, W. Va.: Monastery of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross of the Discalced Carmelite Nuns, n.d.), 10.

A LITTLE BOOK
OF
PRACTICAL SAYINGS
Advices and Prayers
OF
OUR REVERED FOUNDRESS,
MOTHER MARY CATHARINE MCAULEY
WHO COMMENCED THE INSTITUTE OF
OUR BLESSED LADY OF MERCY
DECEMBER 12TH 1831,
AND
DIED NOVEMBER 11TH 1841.

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1868.

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PRACTICAL SAYINGS
OF
OUR REVERED FOUNDERESS

Humility.

(Rule and Constitutions, Part I, Chapters 18,19)

WE can never be happy nor feel as we ought until we bring ourselves to the conviction that we are treated by everybody better than we deserve.

The longer we are in Religion the more humble, patient and subdued our manner should become, free from all agitation, hurry or discomposure.

How contrary to humility would it be to hear a Religious speak in an authoritative tone, or give her opinion in a confident, decided manner, when she should consider her opinion as nothing and herself a nobody.

The very tone of voice and manner of walking should be humble and subdued; the words me and myself should rarely be uttered; we should shun speaking of self or of our works.

We should delight to be unknown that we may the more resemble our Blessed Saviour, who was constantly labouring and doing a great deal for the glory of His Father and for our salvation without bringing Himself into notice or being distinguished.

See how quietly the great God does all His mighty works: darkness is spread over us at night and light returns in the morning, and there is no noise of closing shutters or drawing curtains.

A Religious should seem to be asking a favour of those whom she employs rather than commanding them; and should they neglect to follow her directions, she must shew by her patience and sweetness that if she feels at all, it is because they have offended God, and not because they have inconvenienced her.

In conversation we should avoid bringing

ourselves into notice, either directly or indirectly; a Religious should avoid as much as possible distinguishing herself in any way, and if she should become remarkable at all, let it be for not being remarkable and for being the most hidden and unknown.

Let us not feel distressed that others know our faults, we all have our imperfections and shall have them till our death.

God has never bestowed all His blessings on one person. He did not give to St. Peter what He gave to St. Paul, nor to either what He gave to St. John.

If we are humble and sincere God will finish in us the work He has begun, He never refuses His grace to those who ask it.



Charity.

(Rule and Constitutions, Part I, Chapter 17.)

THE prosperity or advancement of the Institute does not depend on, nor is it to be attributed to the good reader, writer, or highly accomplished religious, although such

advantages are very desirable, but to the humble, cordial, affectionate, obliging, complying and charitable Sister.

Our exercises of Charity performed abroad will have no value before God if there be not established at home a solid foundation of this virtue; and although want of health or capacity may hinder a Sister from taking part in the active duties or zealous works of the Institute, she is yet doing a great deal, both for God and her Community, if she is kind and charitable to all.

One word of instruction from the Sister who conducts herself in the gentle spirit of her Redeemer, will have far more effect than all that could be said by another who departs from it.

Your conversation should be always simple and useful, and you should observe gentleness of manner, particularly towards your Sisters, avoiding all stiffness and reserve, endeavouring thus to draw souls to God.

Our divine Saviour's example should be before us under all circumstances, particularly in exercising charity towards our

neighbour, and more especially towards those who are united with us in Religion.

Nothing can be more disgraceful than to hear a Religious say anything sharp ; it at once renders her habit unbecoming to her.

If every one would mind their own business, the Convent would be a heaven upon earth.

Our mutual respect and charity is to be cordial; now cordial signifies something that revives, invigorates and warms; such should be the effects of our love for each other.

The charity of God would not avail us if His mercy did not come to our aid. Mercy is more than charity: it not only bestows benefits but receives us anew, and pardons again and again even the most ungrateful.



Holy Poverty.

(Rule and Constitutions, Part I, Chapters 5, 15, 22.)

THE Religious who possesses poverty of spirit should learn to be calm and unmoved in all accidents: she must listen to

the most painful tidings without shewing any of those worldly unsubdued feelings so contrary to the character of the true Religious: our vow of poverty ought to subdue and break down all worldly spirit. Why is it that the poor sit quietly and take their meals and work on in the same room with a dead relation lying before them? Their spirit is subdued by want and humiliation ; they are not sensitive; they are not alive to these things.

In the use of temporal things a Religious should always remember that she has not come to a house of plenty, but to a state of strict poverty.

The truest poverty consists in seeing that our wants are scantily supplied and rejoicing in the scarcity.

Time is wasted and lost when we are not employing it for the glory of God and our own sanctification.

Our love for poverty must not be lessened even in time of sickness, and we should not desire remedies unsuited to our state: the poor may indeed be able to procure some

little nourishment or delicacy for their invalids, but they have not the means of removing them to a country place.

In food and raiment a Religious should always desire to have the worst allotted to her, in order to imitate more perfectly Jesus Christ crucified, but should the best be given to her she is not to be uneasy or suppose she has failed against poverty; on the contrary, should she obstinately refuse, she would be usurping to herself the power of making a choice which she had sacrificed to God.

We should understand well what religious poverty is : it is an entire abnegation of self, a spirit entirely broken. A Religious should consider herself a mere abject, a nobody—and she proclaims aloud that she has chosen this ; so that no matter how she is treated or by whom she is neglected, she is not to be surprised or take notice of it, unless the spiritual welfare of the person may render it necessary, or the duty she has the charge of may require it.

The fruits of poverty are: 1st. Great peace of mind under all circumstances; so that

nothing disturbs the real happiness of a Religious, because she lives by faith. 2nd. Great joy in the Holy Ghost, which the want of temporal comforts will never lessen; for Christ our Blessed Lord and His Holy Parents had none and yet were always full of peace and joy.



Obedience.

(Rule and Constitutions, Part I, Chapter 7.)

If a person about to enter a Convent were asked what duties will be assigned to you, what rules must you observe? She would answer: I do not exactly know, I am going to become a Religious and do whatever I am told.

Obedience belongs particularly to Religious; poverty and chastity may be vowed in the world, but obedience makes the Nun and comprises all her duties.

An excellent model of true obedience is a little child which loves its mother ; when she

tells it to do anything, how foolish soever it may appear, it will instantly obey.

No trouble is too great when obedience is concerned.

We may feel assured that however unworthy the persons duly appointed to direct us may appear, God will not fail to enlighten them and give them the necessary graces, since Christ saith “He who heareth you, heareth me,” and the happiness of so many of His dear children is therein concerned.

We need only consider how dear our own will has been to us from our earliest years, to know how acceptable a sacrifice it is to God.



Prayer.

(Rule and Constitutions, Part I, Chapters 9, 10, 11.)

YOUR whole life should be a continual act of praise and prayer ; often in the day raising your heart to God and begging the grace to spend that day, at least, in His service.

The object of retreat and of meditation is to obtain a greater love for God. If this be not effected, the days and hours spent therein have been so much lost time for us. Nothing will accomplish this sooner than the custom of using ardent expressions of love for God in all sincerity of heart. It is impossible we could fall into excess in this divine intercourse. We may address God as we would a dear friend to whom we owed a great deal, saying: What should I do only for Thee, my God ! I owe everything to Thee, what can I give Thee in return ! If this become a habit it will soon produce recollection, and be the best distant preparation for prayer we can make, and it will also keep us continually in the presence of God.

We should have a most lively devotion to the ever adorable Sacrament of the Altar; reflecting how dearly our Saviour purchased the happiness we enjoy, sacrificing for us His honour, dignity, and life. Oh, how carefully should we watch that we may never, through our own fault, lose the grace of Holy Communion.

Without the Blessed Sacrament perseverance is impossible. It is by means of the graces received therefrom that our spiritual life is maintained and that we are enabled to persevere in our holy state.

If Jesus Christ were not present on the Altar there would be no Convent, we should not like to dwell in it ; we should only be like a number of people congregated together in any other house.

Of all our ordinary actions or duties that of hearing Mass is of the greatest consequence. From the moment the Priest comes to the Altar until he leaves it, we should endeavour to banish with the greatest diligence every thought that is not of God. We should follow the Priest through the different stages of the Sacrifice, by saying the short prayers for that purpose with the greatest fervour; and a little before the Elevation to beg of God that He would grant us for that day His supporting, animating grace, which will enable us to discharge all the duties of the day in such a manner as will give glory to God and sanctify our souls, begging the

same for all our Religious Sisters. We should ask this with fervour, as if we were to die half an hour after, and ask it but for one day, each day will bring a fresh supply for itself.



Religious Modesty.

(Rule and Constitutions, Part I, Chapters 15, 16.)

A religious character is that in which everything is tranquil and subdued, and from which all that is trifling and childish is banished.

Religious gravity is most beautiful and attractive, but it is quite different from, quite opposite to gloom or sullenness; it repels all intrusion and renders undue familiarity impossible. A Religious should endeavour always to have a cheerful countenance and a manner equally free from restraint and levity.

It is said of our Lord that He was always pleasing to behold, and it gives great edification to Seculars to see Religious orderly

in their appearance; therefore they should carefully avoid everything bordering on negligence or disorder in their persons.

Not all our distractions in prayer or neglect of duty would cause God to withhold His graces from a Religious so much as her departure from His ways. A Sister who is considered the most active of the Community, who manages a great deal of business, and does this with what is called “fuss,” is departing from the ways of God, which are all peace and tranquillity. The humble, quiet Sister, not doing half so much, but doing all in a manner becoming the character of a Religious, would attract the eye of God far more and draw down greater graces on herself and others. Call a person from the world and ask, according to this description, which of the two Religious walks in the ways of God ; even the most ignorant will unquestionably make a just decision.

Religion refines and elevates the character. A perfect Religious is a perfect lady.



Cheerfulness.

(Rule and Constitutions, Part I, Chapters 2, 3, 7.)

AS the most acceptable return a benefactor can receive from those on whom he bestows favours is a countenance testifying the gratitude of the heart, how acceptable must it be to God when we make Him this return, shewing to all by our cheerful, happy countenance, the gratitude with which our hearts overflow towards Him for His many favours in this life and His great promises for the life to come.

We seem to forget that God calls upon us to take up our cross, and that this cross must be composed of something; that He requires of us constant watchfulness over our thoughts and words. And is this restraint, this self-denial, to make us gloomy, sad or peevish? No ! such is not His intention, for it is to those who deny themselves He has declared that “His yoke is sweet and His burden light”; but then this is a conditional promise, it is not made to those who drag the cross after them, who almost push it from

them. No ! it is to those who take it up that He will make the bitter things sweet and the sweet things bitter. He will make labour and penance sweet and delightful, and worldly enjoyments and the things they have left bitter, so as to feel nothing for them but disgust. (Our Foundress used to illustrate this maxim by the comparison of a little child carrying with delight a great doll, the weight of which does not oppress nor fatigue because it is a dearly cherished object.)

We should be watchful over our countenance and our whole comportment, that it may be always pleasing and never gloomy or harsh, although we might appear sorrowful. It is said of our divine Redeemer that He was always pleasing to behold and never sad or troublesome.

Try to view passing events as you will in a year hence, or as if they had happened a year ago.



Patience and Mortification.

(Rule and Constitutions, Part I, Chaps. 3, 6, 12; Part II, 6.)

BE always striving to make yourselves like our blessed Lord ; endeavour to resemble Him in some one thing at least, so that any person who sees you or speaks with you may be reminded of His sacred life on earth.

Try to act so in all times and places, that if our divine Lord were to appear on earth again, He might not be ashamed to point you out as one intimately united with Him and so nearly allied to Him.

Even our nearest and dearest friends expect to find a change in us after we have embraced this state of life : they look for something different from themselves. Let us never give them cause to say, “she is not in the least changed ; she is just the same as she was in the world.”

God asks for our heart : let us remember that we must offer it to be mortified, crucified and humbled. Do we offer it generously

to God, or do we not rather seek to shelter it from whatever might afflict it.

In vain can we hope to be united to God in any other way than by the cross. The outward works of charity in which a generous heart takes pleasure will not effect this union. The heart must be crucified before it can be united closely with the heart of our crucified Saviour.

When or how do we expect to take up our Cross and follow Christ, if we are not to meet with it in those with whom we are associated?

Religious Chastity and Mortification require that everything in a Religious should be in accordance with the sanctity of her state. When everything accords in a piece of sculpture or statuary it is said to be chaste. If there be anything trifling in the conduct of a Religious, or contrary to the divine original, which she is supposed to copy, she fails in the perfection of her vow of chastity.



Ordinary Duties.

(Rule and Constitutions, Part I, Chapters 1, 13, 14, 21;
Part II, 6, 9.)

THE design of God in calling you to religion is that you should give glory to His name ; and this you are to do not only by sanctifying your own soul, but also by attracting others to God by word and example, so that in all they see and hear of you they may be induced to say, “Glory be to God !” “Praise be to God !”

You should remember that not to advance is to go back, and reflect each day what you can do more to attract God’s love and friendship than you did the day before.

There is nothing of greater importance than the perfect discharge of our ordinary duties ; rising at the appointed moment, and begging of God if He spare us for that one day we may spend it in such a manner as may be meritorious of eternal life ; endeavouring whilst dressing to keep our minds recollected,—at all times dressing quickly ; this is one of the few duties that ought to

be performed in haste ; we should also pay attention to our appearance with the pure intention of pleasing God.

At our meals we should not eat or drink with eagerness, nor pass observations on the Sisters as to whether they eat heartily or not.

A Religious should never allege as excuse for saying what might give bad example or pain to others, even unintentionally, "I did not recollect." She should be always recollected ; every word she says ought to edify, at least, no word should escape her which could disedify.

We should recollect in conversation the measured manner in which our divine Model spoke, using only necessary words.

Never speak with contempt of any nation, profession, or class of people ; and at all times shew the greatest respect to Priests. (Our Foundress always used the word "Sir" in addressing even the Chaplain, who had been for some years an intimate friend.)

Let us sometimes refrain from saying even what would be innocent in a spirit of mortification, making an offering of it to God.

Recreation is a duty, but as soon as anything gives pain, it ceases to be a jest.

We ought often to reflect on the manner in which the blessed Virgin practised the different virtues, and on all her ways ; thinking how she replied to the Angel when he announced the mystery of the Incarnation. She says no unnecessary word, asks no useless questions. What a lesson for us to refrain from making idle enquiries which have their source in mere curiosity. We should also implore her assistance in our duties : in going to the sick, to beg that we may perform that duty with the same charity, prudence, reserve and modesty with which she would have acted; and so of other duties.

Humility, meekness, modesty, and a sweet, loving conformity to God's will should be our interior and exterior attendants. Not such a conformity as to say, "I am content to suffer this affliction or annoyance"; and at the same time shew by our countenance a want of this disposition.

The Sister who has a great deal to do with

others, and having given directions about work or other matters finds them not attended to, must take care then not to act like a mistress in the world ; she should never depart from what her state strictly obliges her to, which is to give good example by her meekness and forbearance. We may depend upon it, the blessing of God will never attend any of our undertakings which are conducted in a hurried, impetuous manner.

Be careful never to make too many laws; if you draw the string too tight it will break.

What a shame should we bring the religious state into disrepute by remaining in our imperfections, and leaving it in the power of others to say : of what use are Retreats or other pious observances when such or such a Sister remains just the same.

You cannot be otherwise than happy while the spirit of your vocation animates your actions. The daily review and interrogation, “What had God in view in calling me to this state?” “Do I endeavour in every thought, word and action to correspond with

His intentions in my regard?" These are all important. As I am certain you attend to them, happiness must await you even when you have many charges to bring against yourself.

The examination of conscience is a duty which no one can perform for you, neither Bishop, nor Priest, nor Superior. They cannot take your mind into their possession and say, "I will settle this matter for you." They can only point out the means.

The Rosary is a most powerful means of obtaining every grace. The "Holy Mary" in particular should be said with the greatest fervour, begging of the blessed Virgin to assist us now and at the hour of our death. We should have the most tender devotion to the blessed Mother of our Redeemer; for if we had in our possession only a garment which He had worn during His mortal life, how greatly should we prize it !

A Religious should consider herself as "a stranger and pilgrim on earth," having her conversation in heaven. This is the happiness of religious life, every day preparing to

enter our own country; and when we retire to rest wishing for that happy hour.

Each day is a step we make towards eternity; and we shall continue thus to step from day to day until we take the last step which will bring us into the presence of God.

We may perceive from all our instructions that a strong and lively faith is the solid foundation of all virtue. We must often beg of God to grant us this virtue, and to preserve us from the dreadful inconsistency of contradicting our faith and our religious profession by our actions. Let us attend carefully to holy inspirations, saying fervently that petition: "From the neglect of Thy holy inspirations, Jesus, deliver us."

The hopes and fears of a Religious ought to be centered in God ; we ought to hate nothing but sin.



A Meditation.

THE study of a Religious should be the life and maxims of Jesus Christ; this divine Model should be in her regard like a

book continually open before her, from which she is to learn what she is to think, say and do—in what manner, at what time ; and this maxim should be engraven on her heart, that although she possessed a knowledge of all the sciences which have ever been known to man, and was distinguished for sense, prudence and elegance, so as to gain the admiration of everyone, yet if she has not studied Jesus Christ and formed her mind on His example, she is as nothing in His eyes, and wants all in wanting the science of the Saints.

In order to study Jesus Christ, you must render yourself familiar with His meekness, patience, forbearance, charity in word and work, contempt of all earthly distinction, sincerity, obedience, love of prayer, humility, conformity. Take each virtue separately, meditate on His manner of practising it, and pray that His spirit may be infused into your heart to soften and prepare it to receive His divine impression as a seal thereon.

That you may profit by meditating on Jesus Christ, you must guard your mind

from all unprofitable thoughts, and reduce to practice one virtue after the manner of Jesus Christ, and then another, but not till you are well practised in one. Suppose silence: I could speak much to the purpose on this matter—I will not say a word. Christ, my beloved Spouse, when He could have attracted the whole world, was silent. And so from virtue to virtue until you go through all the science of salvation.

We find those who can enumerate very particularly all that Jesus Christ said and did, but what does He care for that? He said and did so, not that we should recount it in words, but shew Him in our lives, in our daily practice. Thus only can we realize what He designed in our regard, and without which we cannot be truly united to Him.



Advice to a Novice.

YOU are timely in thinking of your profession, and I feel satisfied you will make due preparation for it, and that you

will never be unworthy of so great a favour. I expect to see a sweet and holy reserve in all my dear Sister Novices, which will be as a shield around them. This word “reserve” is most extensively useful for meditation. If we acquire religious reserve we shall never speak too much, in word or in thought, write too much, grieve too much, laugh too much; and when we do all things in due order and do not exceed in any, then a good foundation will be laid for advancement in religious perfection. May God grant to us all this beautiful reserve that restrains words, looks and actions, and that continually whispers “go back”; “stop”; “say no more.” It is much to be desired and of immense value.



Various Observations.

IT was a favourite observation of our revered Foundress that the word MERCY has five letters, corresponding with the five wounds of our Lord and the five letters of

His holy name Jesus; and this coincidence should make us rejoice in our title.

She used often to say that *common sense* was one of the most necessary qualities for a Sister in our Institute. "But," she would add, "it is the most *uncommon* of all things."

She used most impressively to warn the Sisters against the evil of yielding to temper or whim ; her words were, no one should be able to say of a Nun, "She is in a good humour to-day, we may ask her to do this or that"; or "She is not in a good humour, be careful how you speak." Our Foundress used to illustrate this by an anecdote of a family she had been acquainted with, in which there were several sisters, no longer young. Occasionally one would be absent from the family circle, then another, but to the question, "Is Miss N. or N. ill?" the answer invariably was, "Oh no, she has only a 'turn of the temper.'"

Our foundress required the strictest attention to politeness and good manners towards each other. She used often to say that any departure from the rules of good

breeding was usually the cause of some breach of charity ; and “good manners,” she would observe, “add to the value of good works.”

She did not like the Sisters to use long words in speaking or writing, remarking that in the Psalms and other parts of Holy Scripture inspired by the divine wisdom, there was scarcely a word of more than three syllables.

She wished to see all writing neatly done and divided into different paragraphs, which, she said, made it more easy to be read. She set great value on spiritual writing.

Our Foundress loved music very much, and she would constantly ask the Sisters to play and sing innocent, cheerful songs at recreation, beginning them or joining in them herself. She always tried to have a piano in the Community Room in all the Convents she founded.

“Water is free beverage” was one of her sayings, and therefore the Sisters are allowed a draught of water at any time they may require it.

Writing to a Priest, who asked an account of the Institute, in the year 1839, she concludes her brief notice by saying, “one thing is remarkable, that no breach of charity ever occurred amongst us. The sun never, I believe, went down on our anger.”

Writing from one of her last foundations in 1841, the year she died: “I shall not expect a letter till I return to our old dear habitation,* where I shall never again see all my dearly beloved Sisters—all strange faces now. They say that the first separation from kindred was a ‘joyful sorrow’; but that separations in Religion are “bitter sorrows.” What must it be to me who never met one unkind Sister yet? This is a gloomy subject. We shall all meet in heaven. O what a joy even to think of it !”

On her death bed, the last day of her life, being asked to name the Sister whom she would like to succeed her, she answered, “The Constitutions give the Sisters liberty of choosing for themselves, and I will not interfere.”

*Baggot Street.

On the same day, having desired all the Sisters to be brought to her that she might speak to each as a loving mother, her first and last injunction to all was to preserve union and peace amongst each other; that if they did they should enjoy great happiness, such as they should wonder where it came from.

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*Advice to a Sister in the Office of Superior,
written by her in rhyme.*

Don't let crosses vex or tease;
Try to meet all with peace and ease;
Notice the faults of every day
But often in a playful way,
And when you seriously complain
Let it be known to give you pain.
Attend to one thing at a time,
You've fifteen hours from six to nine.
Be mild and sweet in all your ways,
Now and again bestow some praise;
Avoid all solemn declarations,
All serious close investigations;

Turn what you can into a jest
And with few words dismiss the rest.
Keep patience ever at your side,
You'll want it for a constant guide.
Shew fond affection every day
And, above all, devoutly pray
That God may bless the charge He's given,
And make of you their guide to heaven.

Prayers

WRITTEN BY OUR REVERED FOUNRESS FOR
DIFFERENT OCCASIONS.

Morning Offering.

O my most compassionate Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, I humbly beseech Thee to look on me this day with pity, and grant me the grace to be pleasing and acceptable to Thee even for one moment.

Act of Resignation

My God, I am Thine for all eternity. Teach me to cast my whole self into the arms of Thy Providence with the most lively, unbounded confidence in Thy compassionate, tender pity. Grant, O most merciful Redeemer, that whatever Thou dost ordain or permit may always be acceptable to me. Take from my heart all painful anxiety; suffer nothing to afflict me but sin; nothing

to delight me but the hope of coming to the possession of Thee, my God, in Thine own everlasting kingdom. Amen.

Prayer to be said for a Sister dangerously ill.

My God, look down with mercy and pity on our dear Sister afflicted with sickness. Give her perfect resignation to Thy divine Will, and graciously enable her to suffer without complaining whatever Thou art pleased to appoint. Compassionate Lord Jesus support and comfort her.

Blessed Mother of God and all ye happy Saints intercede for her, that she may pass through this time of trial so as to purify her heart from the smallest stain, that at the hour of her departure from this miserable world she may enter on the joys of a happy eternity. Amen.

For a Sister in Retreat, before Clothing or Profession.

Almighty and most merciful God, we earnestly beg Thy grace and blessing for

our sister in Retreat. Assist her, we humbly beseech Thee, to accomplish Thy holy Will; direct her particularly in what she is about to undertake, and teach her to act in the manner most pleasing to Thy Divine Majesty. Enlighten her by Thy wisdom, support her by Thy power, and by Thine infinite goodness direct all her exertions on this occasion to Thy greater glory and her own external salvation. Amen.

A Favourite Aspiration.

Mortify in me, dear Jesus, all that displeases Thee, and make me according to Thine own heart's desire.

Her Favourite Prayers.

The Thirty Days' Prayer in honour of our divine Lord, and that also in honour of our blessed Lady.

The Psalter of Jesus.

The Universal Prayer.

The Seven Penitential Psalms, with the Paraphrase by Fr. Blyth.

Her Favourite Book.

“The Following of Christ,” especially the Chapters 30th of Book 3rd, and 8th of Book 4th.

For her private devotions she had only “The Devotions to the Sacred Heart” (the edition translated by Rev. Joseph Joy Dean), which she used for Mass, preparation for Holy Communion, &c.; but in speaking of preparation for Holy Communion, she often told the Sisters that the fervent discharge of daily duties would suffice if they had not opportunity for extra prayers; and once, perceiving she had caused a feeling of anxiety on this head by relating the practices of piety, seclusion, &c., she had known an old Protestant friend to employ in order to fit herself for receiving their Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, she immediately explained that the ordinary daily duties of our state included works of piety and charity more numerous and more precious before God than the occasional works of piety adopted

by persons living in the world, even by those possessed of the true faith.

Speaking of the duty of making frequent visits to the Most Holy Sacrament, as our Rule requires, our Foundress used to say that as nearly all our spiritual exercises are to be performed in presence of the Ever Adorable Sacrament, and that we assemble in choir before and after meals, that we go to our divine Lord to beg His blessing before we engage in the works of mercy allotted us, coming back to Him after we have been out to the sick or to strangers—we may be assured that we do every day make frequent visits, although our occupations might be so numerous as to leave no time for anything more.

(It was a few years after the death of our revered foundress that our Sisters in Baggot Street* introduced the pious custom of the “Three Visits” of devotion in private, as a means of removing all anxiety with regard to the precept of our Rule on this subject.)

*The first and Parent House of our Institute.

Favourite Verses of our Foundress.

“Do unto others as you would they should do unto you.”

Precept divine! to earth in mercy given,
 O sacred rule of action worthy heaven!
 Wer't thou the guide of life, we all should
 know
 A sweet exemption from the worst of woe;
 No more the powerful would the weak oppress
 But all would learn the luxury to bless;
 And avarice from its hoarded treasures give,
 Unasked, the liberal boon that want might
 live.
 Thou righteous law! whose dear and useful
 light
 Sheds o'er the mind a ray divinely bright,
 Condensing in one line whate'er the sage
 Has vainly taught in many a laboured page:
 May every heart thy hallowed voice revere,
 To justice sacred and to nature dear!

Sweet mercy! soothing, patient, mild and
 kind,
 Softens the high and lifts the fallen mind,

Knows with soft rein and even hand to guide;
Nor yields to fear, nor knows exacting pride,
Not soon provoked, it easily forgives,
Is all to all, and with a look relieves,
Soft peace it brings wherever it arrives,
Removes our pains, and crowns with peace
our lives.

Appendix

Some Further Sayings of Catherine McAuley

It is not possible to form an exhaustive list of the sayings of Catherine McAuley. They are threaded throughout her letters, the early biographical manuscripts written about her by her contemporaries, the original Rule she composed, her “Spirit of the Institute” essay, her other writings, and the recorded memories of her firsthand witnesses. What is offered here is simply a selection to accompany those given in the foregoing *Practical Sayings*. They are presented in no particular order (that would seem like too much editorializing). All can be found in the manuscripts in *Catherine McAuley and the Tradition of Mercy* (1995) or in the *Correspondence of Catherine McAuley, 1818-1841* (2004), in both of which many more of her sayings can be found. A list of her authentic sayings has also been on the mercyworld.org website.

Put your whole confidence in God. He never will let you want necessities for yourself or children.

Catherine McAuley to Angela Dunne,
December 20, 1837

While we place all our confidence in God—we must act as if all depended on our exertion.

Catherine McAuley to Frances Warde,
November 24, 1840

You have given all to God without any reserve. Nothing can happen to you which He does not appoint. You desire nothing but the accomplishment of His Holy Will. Every thing, how trivial soever, regarding you will come from this adorable source.

Catherine McAuley to Frances Warde,
February 17, 1838

Will we all meet in Heaven—oh what joy—even to think of it.

Catherine McAuley to Teresa White,
February 3, 1841

There has been a most marked Providential Guidance which the want of prudence—vigilance—or judgment has not impeded—and it is here that we can most clearly see the designs of God. . . . In short, it evidently was to go on—and surmount all obstacles—many of which were great indeed—proceeding from causes within and without. One thing is remarkable—that no breach of charity ever occurred amongst us. The sun never, I believe, went down on our anger. This is our only boast—otherwise we have been

deficient enough . . . but we will try to do better—all of us.

Catherine McAuley to Elizabeth Moore,
January 13, 1839

The simplest and most practical lesson I know . . . is to resolve to be good today—but better tomorrow. Let us take one day only in hands at a time, merely making a resolve for tomorrow.

Thus we may hope to get on—taking short careful steps, not great strides.

Catherine McAuley to Mary de Sales White,
February 28, 1841

The Lord and Master of our House and Home is a faithful provider. Let us never desire more than enough. He will give that and a blessing.

Catherine McAuley to Teresa Purcell,
Early 1841

Such is the mysterious Providence of God . . . “His ways are not like our ways—nor His thoughts like our thoughts.” [Isaiah 55.8]

Catherine McAuley to Catherine Leahy,
November 13, 1840

When we give ourselves entirely into the hands of God he will so sweetly ordain all things for our greater comfort, even in this life.

Mary Vincent Whitty to Cecilia Marmion,
quoting Catherine McAuley, November 13,
1841

If you give yourself entirely to God—all you have to serve Him—every power of your mind and heart—you will have a consolation you will not know where it comes from.

Mary Vincent Whitty to Cecilia Marmion,
quoting Catherine McAuley, November 11,
1841

Will you tell the sisters to get a good cup of tea—I think the community room would be a good place—when I am gone, and to comfort one another—but God will comfort them.

Mary Vincent Whitty to Cecilia Marmion,
quoting Catherine McAuley, November 12,
1841

God knows I would rather be cold and hungry than the poor in Kingstown or elsewhere should be deprived of any consolation in our power to afford.

Catherine McAuley to Teresa White,
November 1, 1838

The blessing of unity still dwells amongst us—and oh what a blessing—it should make all things else pass into nothing. . . . This is the Spirit of the order indeed—the true Spirit of Mercy—flowing on us. . . . Thousands of thanks and praises to His Holy Name.

Catherine McAuley to Elizabeth Moore,
April 12, 1841

May God bless the poor Sisters of Mercy and make them very humble that they may not be unworthy of the distinguished blessings God has bestowed upon them.

Catherine McAuley to Elizabeth Moore,
July 28, 1840

[On her deathbed, Catherine McAuley] “said to each one individually what was most suited, but her first and last injunction to all was to preserve union and peace amongst each other—that if they did they would enjoy great happiness such as that they would wonder where it came from.”

Elizabeth Moore to Mary Ann Doyle,
November 21, 1841

This Institute is in a special manner founded on Calvary, there to serve a crucified Redeemer.

Catherine McAuley, original Rule and
Constitutions, II 6.2

Let those whom Jesus Christ has graciously permitted to assist Him in the persons of His suffering Poor have their hearts animated with gratitude and love, and placing all their confidence in Him, ever keep His unwearied patience and humility present to their minds.

Catherine McAuley, original Rule and Constitutions, 3.2

No work of charity can be more productive of good to society, or more conducive to the happiness of the poor than the careful instruction of women, since . . . their example and advice will always possess influence, and where ever a religious woman presides, peace and good order are generally to be found.

Catherine McAuley, original Rule and Constitutions, 2.5

*We have one solid comfort amidst this little tripping about: our hearts can always be in the same place, centered in God, for whom alone we go forward—or stay back.
Oh, may He look on us with love and pity and then we shall be able to do anything He wishes us to do—no matter how difficult to accomplish—or painful to our feelings.*

Catherine McAuley to Mary de Sales White,
December 20, 1840

It is not a disposition to bestow gifts, like benevolent persons in the world, that bespeaks generosity of mind for the religious state. It is bestowing ourselves most freely and relying with unhesitating confidence on the Providence of God.

Catherine McAuley to Mary Ann Doyle,
July 24, 1841

Some joyful circumstance will soon prove that God is watching over your concerns which are all his own—but without the cross the real crown cannot come.

Catherine McAuley to Elizabeth Moore,
March 21, 1840

Far better and more profitable for you to receive with all your heart the cross which God will send you in any form or shape He pleases.

Catherine McAuley to Frances Warde,
May 28, 1841

If [Jesus'] blessed words ought to be revered by all, with what loving devotion ought the religious impress them on her memory and try to reduce them to practice.

Catherine McAuley, quoted by Clare Moore,
“Bermondsey Annals”

*How kind and charitable and merciful ought not
“Sisters of Mercy” to be.*

Catherine McAuley, quoted by Mary
Vincent Harnett, “Limerick Manuscript”

*When we first make our vows it is not surprising if we
feel anxious, and pronounce them in a timid, faltering
voice, being as yet unacquainted with the full extent
of His infinite goodness to whom we engage ourselves
for ever; but when we renew them it ought to be with
that tone of joy and confidence which the experience
of His unceasing mercies must inspire.*

Catherine McAuley, quoted by Mary
Vincent Harnett, “Limerick Manuscript”

*We should labour all day like the poor, and have our
rest and recreation after our work [is] finished.*

Catherine McAuley, quoted by Clare Moore,
“Bermondsey Annals”

*It is not everyone, even of those who are benefited,
that feels thankful. If you work with that expectation,
you will often feel disappointed.*

Catherine McAuley, quoted by Clare
Augustine Moore, “Memoir”

May God bless them. May the Holy Ghost pour down His choicest blessings—make them truly good religious. May they live in Union & Charity, and may we all meet in a happy Eternity.

Mary Vincent Whitty to Cecilia Marmion,
quoting Catherine McAuley, November 11,
1841

Mercy, the principal path pointed out by Jesus Christ to those who are desirous of following Him, has in all ages of the church excited the faithful in a particular manner to instruct and comfort the sick and dying poor, as in them they regarded the person of our Divine Master, who has said, “Amen, I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to Me.”

Catherine McAuley, original Rule and
Constitutions, 3.1

They shall be willing on all occasions to help and assist one another, bearing with patience and charity each other's defects, weaknesses, and imperfections.

Catherine McAuley, original Rule and
Constitutions, 8.4

Never let anything cause you trouble or anxiety which is not an offence against God.

Catherine McAuley, quoted by Clare Moore,
“Bermondsey Annals”

God and God alone must be the principal motive of all [our] actions—it is this pure intention of pleasing God that renders the good work valuable.

Catherine McAuley, original Rule and
Constitutions, 5.3

This mutual union and love should . . . eminently characterize religious souls. This should distinguish them . . . as servants of Jesus Christ. The Sisters of this pious Institute, founded and grounded on charity, should therefore make that favorite virtue of their Divine Master their own most favorite virtue. This they should study to maintain and cherish so perfectly amongst them as to live together as if they had but one heart and one soul in God.

Catherine McAuley, original Rule and
Constitutions, 8.2

They shall . . . in conversation, manners and conduct most cautiously avoid whatever may in the least disturb their union, or lessen in the smallest degree their mutual love and charity. They shall as true followers of God walk in love as Christ loved us,

preserving above all things charity, which is the bond of perfection, gaining over souls in the obedience of charity, and in sincerity of heart fervently loving each other.

Catherine McAuley, original Rule and Constitutions, 8.3

They shall bear to each other great and cordial respect and affection, not in outward behaviour, looks, and words only, but also really indeed in heart and mind.

Catherine McAuley, original Rule and Constitutions, 9.2

As this congregation is under her special protection ... the Sisters shall always have the warmest and most affectionate devotion to [Mary, the Mother of God], regarding her in a special manner as their Mother and the great Model they are obliged to imitate that ... they may be enabled to fulfill the obligations of the Institute.

Catherine McAuley, original Rule and Constitutions, 16.1

To devote our lives to the accomplishment of our own salvation and to promote the salvation of others is the end and object of our order of Mercy. These two works are so linked together by our rule ... that they

reciprocally help each other. . . . From each of these we draw new aid and the grace of Jesus Christ which will accompany us in all we undertake with a pure intention of pleasing Him alone.

Catherine McAuley, “Spirit of the Institute”

God never calls any person to any state or for any end without giving the means and necessary helps to carry them through all the difficulties of it, and . . . it is not to be doubted, but that when God institutes a religious order, He gives at the same time the grace that is necessary for such an order, and for all those who are called to that order.

Catherine McAuley, “Spirit of the Institute”

We ought then have great confidence in God in the discharge of all these offices of mercy, spiritual and corporal—which constitute the business of our lives, and assure ourselves that God will particularly concur with us to render them efficacious, as by His infinite mercy we daily experience, and this proceeds, as we have said, from the grace belonging to the vocation or grace of the order.

Catherine McAuley, “Spirit of the Institute”

